

From the Judge at C

"Riding is a partnership. The horse lends you his strength, speed and grace, which are greater than yours. For your part you give him your guidance, intelligence and understanding, which are greater than his. Together you can achieve a richness that alone neither can." ~ Lucy Rees

My name is Liz and in this series of articles I would like to take you on a journey from what is the meaning of "dressage" through the training scale and what characteristics of the horse's way of going the judge is looking for in each movement. What does that 5-6 or 8 mean? I will discuss different phrases such as contact and how it is different from "on the bit". I will try to highlight what judges comments on your tests actually mean in plain English. Finally, we will provide a section for your voice where you can write in with questions that you may have.

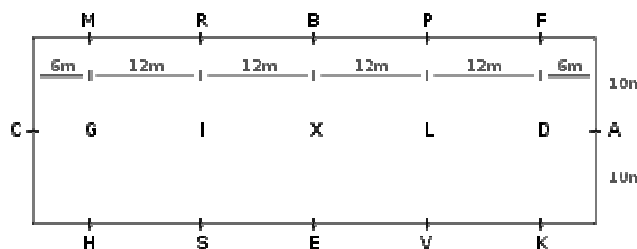
So let us begin.

What is Dressage? It is a French term which is roughly translated into the word "training".

Its fundamental purpose is to develop, through standardized progressive training methods, the horse's natural athletic ability and willingness to perform, thereby maximizing its potential as a riding horse and increases the usable life of the horse plus makes the horse a pleasure to ride.

The very spectacular caprioles and airs above ground that is seen by thousands at the Spanish Riding School had its roots in a very practical application: the horses were trained to leap and kick out this way in battle to free the horse and rider of foot soldiers surrounding them. These horses responded to weight and leg signals from the rider, leaving both hands free to wield weapons of war. So the better trained the horse was in response to the rider's aid, the better the chance of survival for its rider.

Dressage is also occasionally referred to as "Horse Ballet". Early European aristocrats displayed their horses' training in equestrian parades and displays, but in modern dressage, the successful training of the horse from preliminary level to Grand Prix is demonstrated through the performance of "dressage tests", which is a set of prescribed movements ridden within a 60 x 20 metre arena.



Judges evaluate each movement on the basis of an objective standard appropriate to the level of the test and assign each movement a score from zero to ten - zero being "not executed" and 10 being "excellent" (notice I do NOT say perfect!). A competitor achieving all 6s (which means 60% overall) should be considering moving on to the next level.

At the peak of a dressage horse's gymnastic development, it can smoothly respond to a skilled rider's minimal almost invisible aids and perform the requested movement while remaining balanced, energetic but relaxed and appearing effortless. When you see a lovely test where the horse appears to be performing the test on their own – you are seeing excellent training.

This is the ultimate goal of modern dressage; however most of us when starting our dressage career often begin with a test that may look a little more like the one below.



Take heart this is only the beginning of your partnership. Remember don't be afraid of mistakes – every single mistake is a perfect training opportunity you can use to develop towards your goal.

Before we go on there are vital points to remember!!!

1. I am assuming that you ride these wonderful creatures and compete at the competitions because you enjoy riding and love the sport, so remember you are NOT competing for sheep stations it is meant to be fun!
2. The horse will not go any better at a competition than in your home paddock, in fact my old coach used to say that you lose approximately 10% in marks when you compete compared to what you can achieve at home, and she was right! So if the movement is not amazing at home do not expect it to be amazing at your competition
3. When all goes well the rider deserves the credit and rightly so.
4. When there are problems the rider must then bear the responsibility as well. Don't lose your temper at the horse. Your horse, while munching his breakfast hay, does NOT think "I don't really

want to do my novice and elementary tests today so I am going to be very naughty just to make my owner cranky."

5. Some days the test does not go as planned, and whether you are new to the sport or a former Olympian you need to think that today, in this test, the aids were not quite effective and my horse has not really listened to me. The problem could be something as simple as not getting there early enough to warm up correctly or too much warm up and the horse becomes tired, so you make plans on how you will train a little differently for a better result.

Next issue: - the training scale